

Preliminary Summary of Information

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in February 2006

Florsheim Shoe Company Building

3963 W. Belmont Ave.

Built: 1924-26

Architect: Alfred S. Alschuler

Industrial buildings have played a preeminent role in the economic development of Chicago, a major manufacturing center throughout most of its history. The visually prominent six-story Florsheim Shoe Company Building is located at the intersection of two major thoroughfares, W. Belmont Ave. and N. Pulaski Rd., in the Avondale community area. The building was constructed for the Florsheim Shoe Company, a nationally-prominent shoe manufacturer founded and long-headquartered in Chicago.

Built of reinforced concrete with large, bay-spanning windows and brick infill, the Florsheim Shoe Company Building reflects early 20th-century modern architectural ideals as expressed in industrial construction. The building's visible structure and minimal historic ornament place it squarely in the rationalist tradition of early modern American architecture much admired in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s by progressive European architects such as Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier, who saw such "honestly-designed" American industrial architecture as pointing the way to a utopian modern architecture.

The Florsheim building was designed by Alfred S. Alschuler, one of Chicago's prominent 20th-century architects. Alschuler designed such noteworthy buildings as the London Guarantee Building, K.A.M. Isaiah Israel Temple, and the Goldblatt Brothers Department Store on Chicago Ave., all designated Chicago Landmarks. He was also instrumental in pushing Chicago to the forefront of industrial design in the early 20th century, creating functional buildings that were also aesthetically distinguished. He is commonly credited as being one of the first architects in Chicago to use reinforced concrete for the structural framework of his industrial designs, and the Florsheim Shoe Company Building is one of his boldest visual essays in such factory construction.

THE FLORSHEIM SHOE COMPANY AND ITS BUILDING

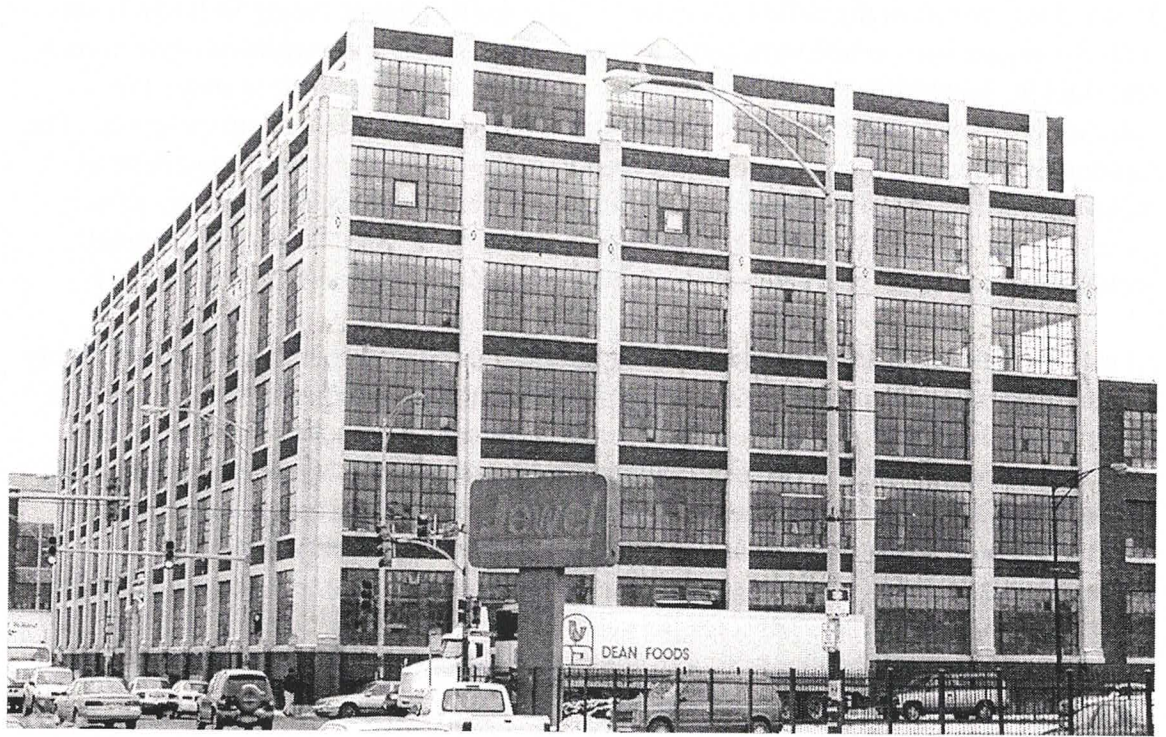
The Florsheim Shoe Company Building was built by one of Chicago's premier shoe manufacturers, whose products were among the best known throughout the United States during the 20th century. The company was founded in 1892 as Florsheim & Co. by Milton Florsheim, whose German-born father Siegmund had come to Chicago in 1862 and become a shoemaker. Florsheim & Co. soon began manufacturing high-quality men's shoes.

After making shoes in existing buildings, Florsheim & Co. built its first factory in 1900 just west of the Chicago River on the southeast corner of Adams and Clinton, and by 1910 the company had 600 workers here. This factory received a seven-story addition in 1912. (Both the original building and annex have been demolished, and a portion of the Riverside Plaza office complex now occupies the site.)

Early on, the Florsheim Shoe Company, the name it took in 1908, developed a marketing strategy that placed great strength on name recognition. Florsheim opened its first company-owned store in Chicago's Loop in the Brand Building at 18 W. Jackson, just off State Street, in 1904 (building demolished), but the vast majority of the company's shoes were sold by independent retailers. Typically in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, retailers bought shoes from manufacturers and placed their own store labels on them. Milton Florsheim objected to this, both in terms of personal pride and corporate marketing, and required retailers to sell the company's shoes under the company's label. Through newspaper and magazine advertising, Florsheim developed a national reputation for high quality, and retailers became eager to showcase the company's shoes in their stores.

The Florsheim Shoe Company grew rapidly during the 1910s and 20s, building two new factory buildings within a five-year period. The first, a four-story brick factory, was built at 3927 W. Belmont Ave. in 1919. Almost immediately, the company began planning a much larger factory building (the subject property) immediately to the west on a site facing Belmont between N. Harding Ave. and N. Pulaski Rd. (then N. Crawford Ave.). The Florsheim Shoe Company took out a building permit for the Florsheim Shoe Company Building on March 4, 1924, and the building opened in 1926.

The resulting six-story building was constructed of reinforced concrete that formed a visible rectilinear grid that visually defines the building's exterior. Projecting concrete piers rose unobstructed from a ground-level base of red brick to the fifth-floor roof parapet, where the building was slightly set back with a large sixth-story penthouse. The large structural bays that were possible using reinforced concrete were glazed with large multi-paned industrial windows of metal and glass above low horizontal red-brick infill panels. The resulting design was clean and spare, depending largely upon fine proportion and scale and the contrast of pale concrete piers with deep-red brick spandrels and dark-painted window sash for visual effect.



The Florsheim Shoe Company Building (top) was constructed in 1924-26 as a factory for this nationally-known shoe manufacturer. Designed by Alfred Alschuler, the building is located on the southeast corner of W. Belmont Ave. and N. Pulaski Rd.

Although the overall appearance of the building is quite spare, some ornament can be found at key points in the building's exterior. The main entrance facing Belmont is set within a simple low-arched terra-cotta surround embellished with medieval-style quoins and shields. In addition, a long and narrow horizontal terra-cotta plaque above the entrance bears the company's name, "The Florsheim Shoe Co." in pale green letters. The building's projecting concrete piers are subtly ornamented with half-diamond concrete moldings and full-diamond brick-and-tile plaques at the top of the fourth floor. (The corners of the building's rooftop parapets have been rebuilt, removing small original sections of terra-cotta ornament similar to that surrounding the building's entrance.)

At the time of the Florsheim Shoe Company Building's construction, shoe manufacturing was an important component of Chicago's industrial might. According to *Chicago, The Great Central Market*, an overview of Chicago commerce and industry published in 1923, there were 29 shoe factories in Chicago, with more than 4,500 workers producing almost 9 million pairs of shoes per year. Chicago's shoe manufacturing industry was noted as second only to that found in New England, and the industry's national prominence was due to both Chicago's location at the nexus of American commercial rail transportation, easing the logistics of shoe shipments to stores nationwide, and the quantity and quality of leather available due to Chicago's Union Stock Yards and the city's 28 tanneries, employing more than 4,000 workers.

In *History of the Jews in Chicago*, published in 1923, Hyman L. Meites notes: "The greatness of Chicago in the commercial world is due to two facts, her unrivaled geographical position, and her vigorous far-sighted leaders." Meites goes on to note the important role that Jewish manufacturers such as Milton Florsheim played in Chicago's clothing and shoe manufacturing trade. The Florsheim Shoe Company is noted as a leading shoe manufacturer, along with the Selz-Schwab Shoe Company.

By the end of the 1920s, Florsheim's annual sales were \$3 million, and the company had five factories in the Chicago area and 2,500 workers. It also had more than 50 company-owned stores around the United States in addition to the hundreds of independently-owned stores that sold Florsheim shoes. The halcyon economy of the 1920s collapsed after the Stock Market crash of 1929, however, and the resulting Great Depression was a very difficult time for American manufacturing. Florsheim, known for its expensive men's shoes, managed to survive both this decade-long economic downturn and the military-oriented economic recovery brought about by World War II, and was one of the top-10 shoe manufacturers in the United States at the end of the war. Anticipating increased business, Florsheim opened a new Chicago factory in 1949 at Adams and Clinton, diagonally across from the site of its first factory. (Now altered, this building has been adapted for residential use.)

In 1953, the Florsheim Shoe Company was sold to shoe manufacturing rival International Shoe Company (later Interco, Inc.), headquartered in St. Louis. For many years, Florsheim was International Shoe's most profitable division, with 14 factories and 500 retail stores nationwide at the beginning of the 1970s. During the 1980s, however, most

The Stratford
Patented Leather.
New Kind
Seamless Top.
For Ladies
Groom

The Stratford
 Natural
 Linenier.
 Easy and
 Downside's Top
 For Female
 Trench

The degree of leather—quality—and the quality of benchwork in The Florsheim Shoe for men, are the highest that human ingenuity and unstinted capital can produce.

The name "Florsheim" woven in every strap and stamped in the sole of every shoe means satisfaction to you. *Satisfaction* in shoe buying is something more than "eye-fancy."

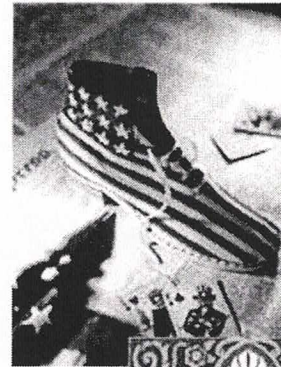
Florsheim Shoe-satisfaction means the possession of an all-around, good-looking shoe, with the same kind of leather and benchmark that you get in the made-to-order shoes for which you pay \$8 to \$12. We make more shoes over each last, and you buy them for \$5.00—there's satisfaction.

More than that is an interesting story. "The Plainness Way of Food Eating." Ask a reader who tells "the Plainness Way, or write us. The Love is Love."

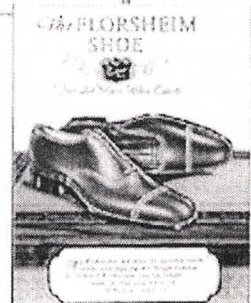
Florsheim & Company, Chicago

Your feet are your best servants—shoe them well.

Placed in Leading Publications by J. Walter Thompson Co.



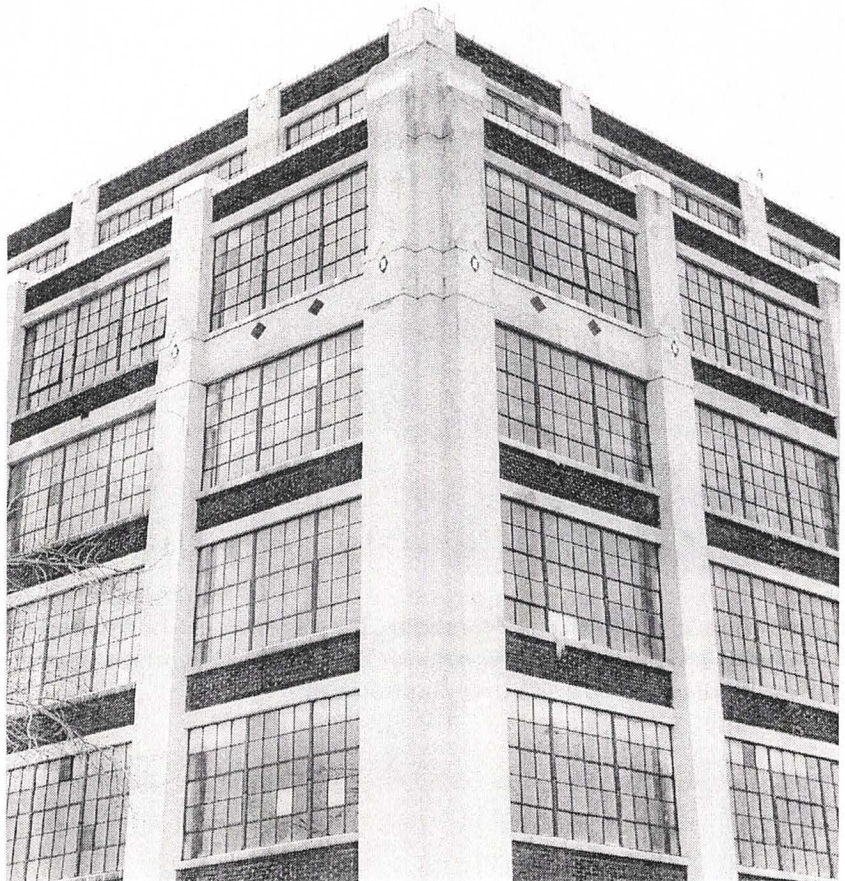
STYLES *of the* TIMES



5



Top: The Florsheim Shoe Company Building is six stories in height and is constructed with a reinforced-concrete frame with the structural bays glazed with large multi-pane windows. Right: The building is an excellent example of a "Daylight" factory building, so-called because its concrete structure allowed for excellent light and ventilation.



of Florsheim's manufacturing went to plants overseas, as was the trend with United States apparel manufacturing in general. It was in 1986 that the building passed out of Florsheim's control, when the parent company, Interco, Inc., sold the building to Records Management Services, Inc.

Interco, Inc. declared bankruptcy in the early 1990s, and in 1994 Florsheim was spun off as an independent company with its headquarters back in Chicago. By 2000, Florsheim retained roughly 10 percent of the market for men's dress shoes. It currently is headquartered in Glendale, Wisconsin, as a unit of Wayco Group, Inc.

MODERNISM AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS

The design of the Florsheim Shoe Company Building exemplifies the many changes that occurred in industrial architecture during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as both building technology and industrial production techniques evolved. The building is a handsome example of a so-called "Daylight" factory building, popular in the early 20th century, a multi-story building built of reinforced concrete with large windows that emphasized both flexible interior spaces and large amounts of daylight to aid in manufacturing.

Through the centuries before the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th and 19th centuries, industrial buildings were small-scale buildings not much different in building materials, construction methods, or scale from other commercial buildings. But the 19th century saw tremendous strides in new sources of power—first based on water, then oil and electricity—that allowed ever larger and more sophisticated industrial machinery set within larger buildings. Large population shifts in industrializing countries such as England, France, and the United States brought millions of people to rapidly growing cities to work in these factories. The products were then marketed on an ever-increasing geographic scale as a result of the development and expansion of railroads and other means of modern transportation.

Industrialization and the development of modern transportation are two key components in the development of Chicago, a major manufacturing center throughout most of its history, and industrial buildings have played a preeminent role in this economic development. The city's earliest factories and warehouses typically clustered together near transportation corridors such as the Chicago River and railroad lines. By the 20th century, however, light industrial buildings had become part of the larger urban fabric, often constituting noteworthy visual "landmarks" in their surrounding neighborhoods.

Prominent architects such as Alfred Alschuler, George Nimmons and Richard Schmidt were among those who pushed Chicago to the forefront of industrial design in the early 20th century, creating functional buildings that were aesthetically pleasing. Nimmons

emphasized the significance of industrial buildings in his January 5, 1926, article for *The American Architect*:

“The industries of America more than anything else, have given this country its prominent place among the leading nations of the world, and it is on this account that industrial buildings should stand high in importance in the architecture of this country. Industry occupies a place in the life of the American people that is probably only second to their religion.”

The early 20th century was a period that saw the removal of industry from Chicago’s downtown area and its expansion outward into many developing city neighborhoods and planned industrial districts such as the Central Manufacturing District on Chicago’s South Side. Along with changes in location, the early 1900s was also a time of change in terms of the design and structure of industrial buildings in Chicago. Reinforced-concrete construction increasingly replaced old-style “mill” construction, which had featured load-bearing masonry walls and interior structural systems utilizing heavy timbers and cast-iron columns.

Concrete, made of water, sand and small stone aggregate, is an ancient man-made building material. Ancient Roman architects and engineers raised the use of the material to a high art in grandly-scaled structures such as public baths, temples, aqueducts, and basilicas. The material fell into general disuse in the centuries following the collapse of the Roman Empire, but the late 19th century saw an increasing interest in the material among progressive building engineers and architects looking for “modern” building materials.

Reinforced concrete, or concrete embedded with steel reinforcement “rebars,” first became a choice for factory buildings in the years immediately before World War I. As with steel, reinforced concrete offered great tensile and compressive strength for relatively little cost, and the material allowed the elimination of load-bearing masonry walls. Moreover, reinforced concrete was fireproof and remarkably strong given its relatively light weight and small volume. Such a combination of inexpensive cost, strength, versatility and resistance to fire proved irresistible to designers of industrial buildings.

The switch from heavy load-bearing walls and mill construction to reinforced concrete provided a wealth of design opportunities. Most dramatically, exterior walls could be opened up to broad expanses of windows potentially extending from pier to pier and from floor to ceiling, allowing an unprecedented amount of light and ventilation to permeate interior spaces. The 1907-8 Montgomery Ward & Company Catalog House at 600-18 W. Chicago Avenue (a designated Chicago landmark) is a pioneering example of large-scale reinforced-concrete construction. Designed by Schmidt, Garden & Martin, the 1.25-million square foot warehouse and office building features expansive stretches of broad windows and naturalistic terra-cotta ornamentation.

Writing in the February 1910 issue of *The Architectural Record*, Chicago architect Peter Wight argued that the public appreciated good utilitarian design that was unornamented, yet relieved from monotony through its good proportions alone. In the same article, Wight praised the industrial work of several architectural firms, including Alfred Alschuler, Nimmons and Fellows, and Schmidt, Garden and Martin, noting that their work “will at once be recognized as different from the common run of such buildings.” Wight believed that these and other Chicago architects shared a common approach to industrial design, going so far as to proclaim the creation of a unified movement “on account of its having been the work of many persons acting almost simultaneously.”

Alschuler, for one, believed that all industrial buildings should be assets to the cityscape, as noted in his September 1923 article for *The Inland Printer*:

“A handsome building is an asset which should not be ignored. It should not be secured, however, at a disproportionate first cost or at the expense of operating economy. A treatment I have used successfully in a number of cases is a combination of terra cotta and concrete, which gives the general effect of a full terra façade at a much lower cost. The use of terra cotta for the first one or two floors and for the cornice or coping, with some molding of the concrete on the intermediate floors, has proved both economical and attractive.”

Alschuler was not alone in his determination to raise the design standard of industrial buildings. George Nimmons argued that although the industrial building is typically, “the ugliest and most objectionable building in the community,” it was perfectly feasible to make most industrial buildings and their surroundings “not only attractive but sometimes even beautiful in their architecture and landscape effects,” without any increased expense.

So Chicago architects during the early 20th century began to experiment broadly with different types of exterior design for factory buildings. Wide windows and reinforced-concrete structural systems were increasingly accepted as givens, but building wall cladding and ornament remained a fluid design issue. Most industrial buildings were covered with brick, and visual interest was often created by the addition of specially colored brick and light-colored terra cotta ornament in medieval or Arts-and-Crafts styles. Many factories had visually dramatic, brick-clad towers that sheltered water tanks.

During the late 1920s and into the 1930s, some industrial buildings featured the streamlined, geometric forms typical of the Art Deco style, sometimes combined with stripped down Classical-style detailing, and increasingly were clad with terra cotta. Even if covered with brick, the corners of such buildings and/or their vertical piers were often accentuated through the use of Classical-style pilasters in concrete or stone, which led the eye upward and minimized the appearance of the structural grid.

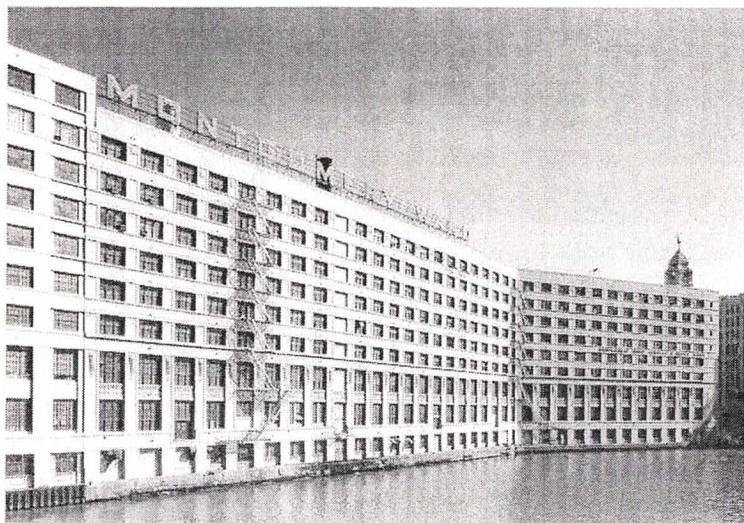
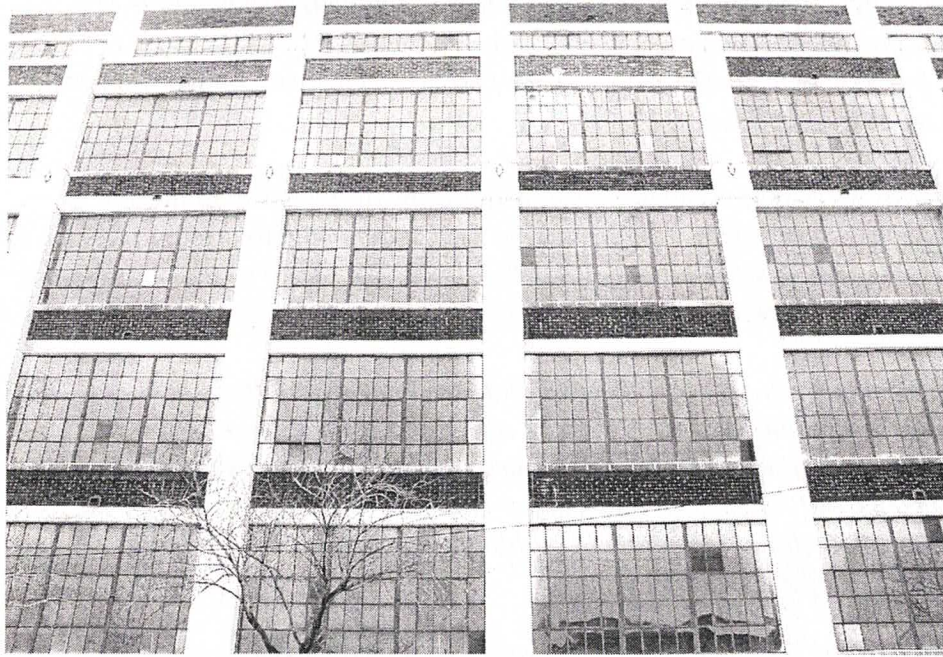
Most industrial buildings built in Chicago during the early 20th century have exterior designs based on the above design ideas, with brick or terra-cotta cladding over their structural frames and with ornamentation based on historic styles. A few factory buildings, however, were built with little or no applied ornament, and their designs—which are recognized today as part of 20th-century modernism—relied mainly on the proportions of their exposed concrete structural frames, the detailing of industrial-sash windows, and the visual contrast of light-colored concrete and darker brick. Based on the Chicago Historic Resources Survey, the Florsheim Shoe Company Building arguably is one of the finest-proportioned and most visually distinctive example of this type of industrial building remaining in Chicago.

Although often considered stark to the American public used to applied ornament on buildings, such American factory buildings were greeted with great admiration by progressive European architects of the period, including the French architect known as Le Corbusier and the German Walter Gropius. These two architects, along with other architects and critics, believed that American industrial architecture, with its reliance on reinforced-concrete structures and simplified building forms, showed the way to a utopian modern architecture. They especially favored buildings that eschewed historic ornament and emphasized light and air through large, structural bay-spanning windows, such as the Florsheim Shoe Company Building. As European modern architecture developed during the mid 20th century, much increasingly had stripped-down buildings forms, visually distinctive structural systems, and large windows, reflecting the influence that American industrial architecture had on this historically profound design movement.

The influence of these industrial buildings on the course of 20th-century world architecture has increasingly been documented by architectural historians. The Detroit architect Albert Kahn especially has been noted by histories of architecture for his reinforced-concrete factory buildings for Detroit-area companies such as the Ford Motor Company's Highland Park plant in Highland Park, Michigan, built in 1909. Recognition of the Florsheim Shoe Company Building's place in the history of Chicago industrial architectural design is part of this broadening understanding of the important place that 20th-century industrial architecture has in the history of Chicago.

ARCHITECT ALFRED S. ALSCHULER

Alfred S. Alschuler (1876-1940), the architect of the Florsheim Shoe Company Building, was one of Chicago's most prominent early 20th-century architects. Born in Chicago to German immigrant parents, Alschuler received bachelor's and master's degrees in architecture from the Armour Institute of Technology (now the Illinois Institute of Technology), and also took classes at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1900 he began his professional career in the office of Dankmar Adler, and subsequently worked with both Adler and Samuel Atwater Treat until 1907, when he established an independent practice.



The Florsheim Shoe Company Building (top) epitomizes the visually bold designs increasingly used for American Industrial buildings in the early 20th century. Middle: The Montgomery Ward Warehouse, designed by Richard Schmidt and located on the North Branch of the Chicago River, is widely considered the first reinforced-concrete industrial building. Left: The Highland Park plant for the Ford Motor Company, built in Highland Park, Michigan, and designed by Alfred Kahn, has long been noted by architectural historians for its modern, non-historic design.

Although a specialist in the design of industrial buildings, Alschuler also received a wide variety of commissions, including office towers, synagogues, libraries, automobile showrooms, and hotels. By 1913, his practice was well established, with an office staff of forty. In 1926, Alschuler issued a job book with photos of dozens of buildings and numerous advertisements by appreciative contractors and suppliers.

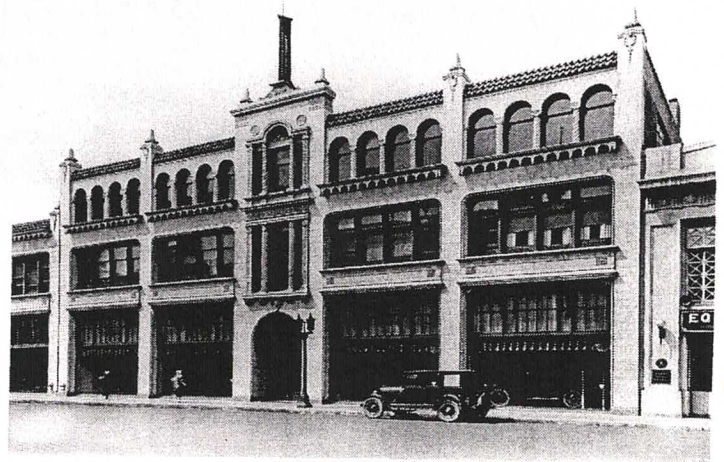
Through the course of his career, Alschuler designed dozens of industrial buildings throughout Chicago, many of which were located in the Central Manufacturing District. A *Chicago Daily News* article from January 23, 1937, noted Alschuler's contributions to the city's industrial architecture:

"Many of the improvements in industrial and commercial buildings in Chicago can be attributed to the genius of Alfred S. Alschuler, one of the city's prominent architects. During the course of thirty-five years or so he has introduced to Chicago such items of far-reaching importance as the extensive use of reinforced concrete in buildings, multicolored terra cotta, and standardized office-building units.

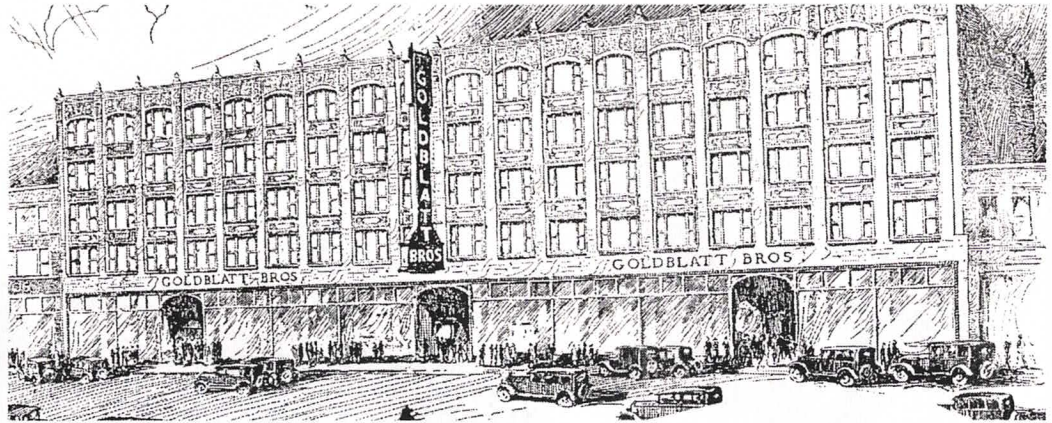
"He recalled today his daring adventure of the year 1900 when he used reinforced concrete in the foundation of the department store at 12th and Halsted Streets, to the dismay of cynics. He also was one of the first to divide a Chicago office building into units of 17 feet each, a measure now accepted as the standard requirement."

Alschuler is commonly credited as being one of the first architects in Chicago to use reinforced concrete as the structural framework for his industrial factories and warehouses. He believed that the necessary features of industrial design were clear floor spaces and excellent natural lighting, both achievable with reinforced-concrete structures, and visual attractiveness. He achieved unobstructed floor spans by grouping together all utilities, such as elevator shafts, stairways, and restrooms, so as not to interfere with the clear floor spaces. Building exteriors could then be ornamented, if desired, with decorative motives, often in terra cotta, illustrating the belief that industrial buildings should be aesthetically pleasing. The Florsheim Shoe Company Building exemplifies this design philosophy.

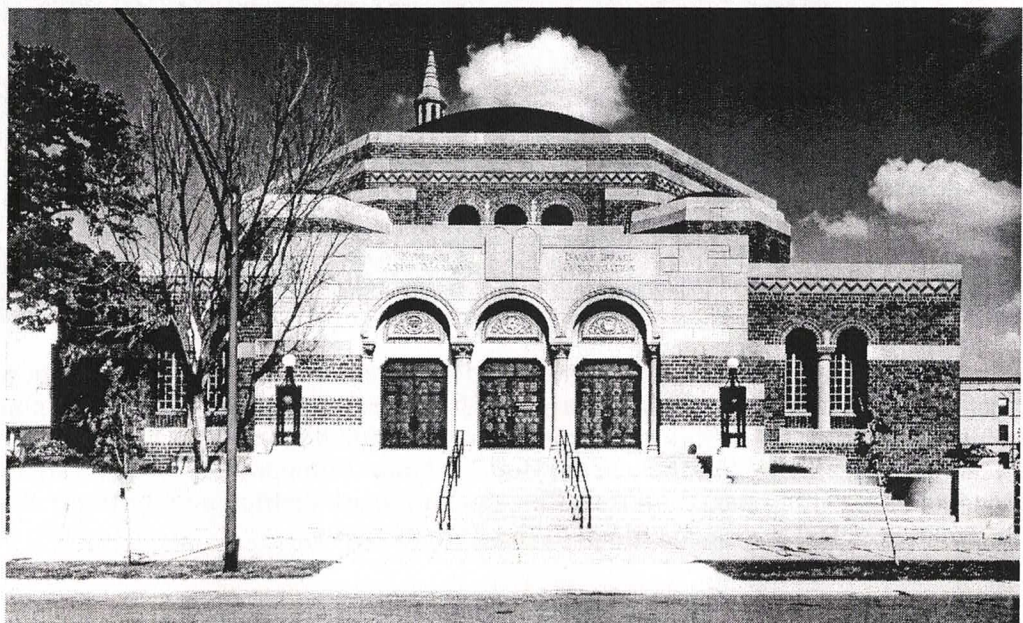
Alschuler's philosophy of building design as applied to industrial buildings can be seen in the Columbian Colortype Company Building at 320 E. 21st Street (1920, extant but remodeled with a rooftop addition for loft apartments), which features several innovations that became standard industry practice. Entrance, docks, stairwells, and all services were pushed to the west wall to minimize interference with clear floor spaces and natural lighting. Economical flat-slab concrete construction reduced vibration from traffic outside and manufacturing equipment inside. The concrete columns were exposed on the main elevations so that—when used in combination with terra cotta detailing at the base, entry and cornice—the effect of a totally brick and terra-cotta façade was achieved without its expense. Today, the Columbian Colortype Building is greatly modified from its original appearance, due to its conversion to residential lofts.



Alfred S. Alschuler (top left), designer of the Florsheim Shoe Company Building, was one of Chicago's prominent early 20th-century architects. His Chicago industrial and commercial buildings reflected his design philosophy that such buildings be both functional and aesthetically pleasing. Noted examples include the Hudson Motor Company Showroom (top right) at 2222 S. Michigan Ave. (within the Motor Row Chicago Landmark District) and (bottom) the John Sexton & Co. Building at 500 N. Orleans Street (now condominiums).



Although Alschuler specialized in industrial architecture, he also received a wide variety of commissions, including office towers, synagogues, libraries, automobile showrooms and hotels. Several noteworthy designs include the Goldblatt Bros. Department Store on Chicago Avenue (top), the London Guarantee Building (middle), and the K.A.M. Isaiah Israel Temple (bottom), all designated Chicago landmarks.



Alschuler's John Sexton & Company Building at 500 N. Orleans Street (1916, 1919) is a dark red brick-clad building with creamy terra-cotta detailing. Built by a grocery and food processing company for use as its office, manufacturing plant and warehouse (now condominiums), this building represents the final stage in Chicago loft construction. Unlike the previous generation of lofts, the elevations not only reflect the various uses of the interior space, but also identify stairwells, light shafts and elevators. The 1919 addition, which added the easternmost 150 feet, matched the original building's load-bearing walls, even though the structural system was now concrete.

A biographical sketch of Alschuler in the Art Institute of Chicago's 1982 publication titled, *Chicago Architects Design: A Century of Architectural Drawings from the Art Institute of Chicago*, remarks:

"At a time when the city was developing an industrial fringe of unattractive functional buildings, Alschuler's harmonious and refined designs and restrained Classical detailing were changing the texture of the city."

The London Guarantee Building (1923) at 360 N. Michigan Avenue (a designated Chicago landmark) was Alschuler's most important commission. Commanding an important setting just across the Chicago River from the Wrigley Building and the Tribune Tower, the 22-story building features a concave façade and is topped by a cupola replicating a Greco-roman lantern. Its design earned Alschuler a gold medal from the North Michigan Avenue Improvement Association for the best new building of 1923 in the North Central District. Other extant office towers by Alschuler include a seven-story addition to the Blum Building at 624 S. Michigan Avenue, which is included in the Historic Michigan Boulevard Chicago Landmark District.

The versatile Alschuler was also known as the "Temple builder" due to the many synagogues he designed, including K.A.M. Isaiah Israel Temple at 1100 E. Hyde Park Boulevard (a designated Chicago landmark). The walls of this Byzantine-style edifice feature polychromatic brick in various shapes laid up randomly to suggest old, sun-baked walls. Another important synagogue design by Alschuler is the Sinai Temple at 4622 S. Martin Luther King Drive (1909-12), now Mt. Pisgah Missionary Baptist Church.

Goldblatt Brothers Department Store (1921-22 and 1925-28) at 1613-35 W. Chicago Avenue (a designated Chicago landmark)—comprising a brick structure with a much larger five-story terra-cotta-clad annex, both designed by Alschuler—is an excellent example of the architect's several department store designs. Other notable buildings by Alschuler include the Legler Regional Library at 115 S. Pulaski (1919) and the Henry W. Austin Public Library at 5615 W. Race (1928), both designed in the Beaux Arts style. Alschuler's 1930 Harrison Hotel at 63 E. Harrison Street is a high-style Art Deco edifice replete with stylized foliage, while automobile showrooms for the Hudson and Marmon automobile-manufacturing companies, located in the Motor Row Chicago Landmark District and both dating from 1922, feature exuberant terra-cotta ornamentation.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sect. 2-120-620 and –630), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a preliminary recommendation of landmark designation for a building, structure, object, or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated “criteria for landmark designation,” as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Florsheim Shoe Company Building be designated a Chicago Landmark.

Criterion 1: Critical Part of the City’s History

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois or the United States.

- The Florsheim Shoe Company Building is a building representing the significance to Chicago of the Florsheim Shoe Company, a nationally-important manufacturer founded and long-headquartered in the City.
- The Florsheim Shoe Company Building, through its historic associations with this nationally-known shoe manufacturer, exemplifies the importance of manufacturing to the economic history of Chicago.

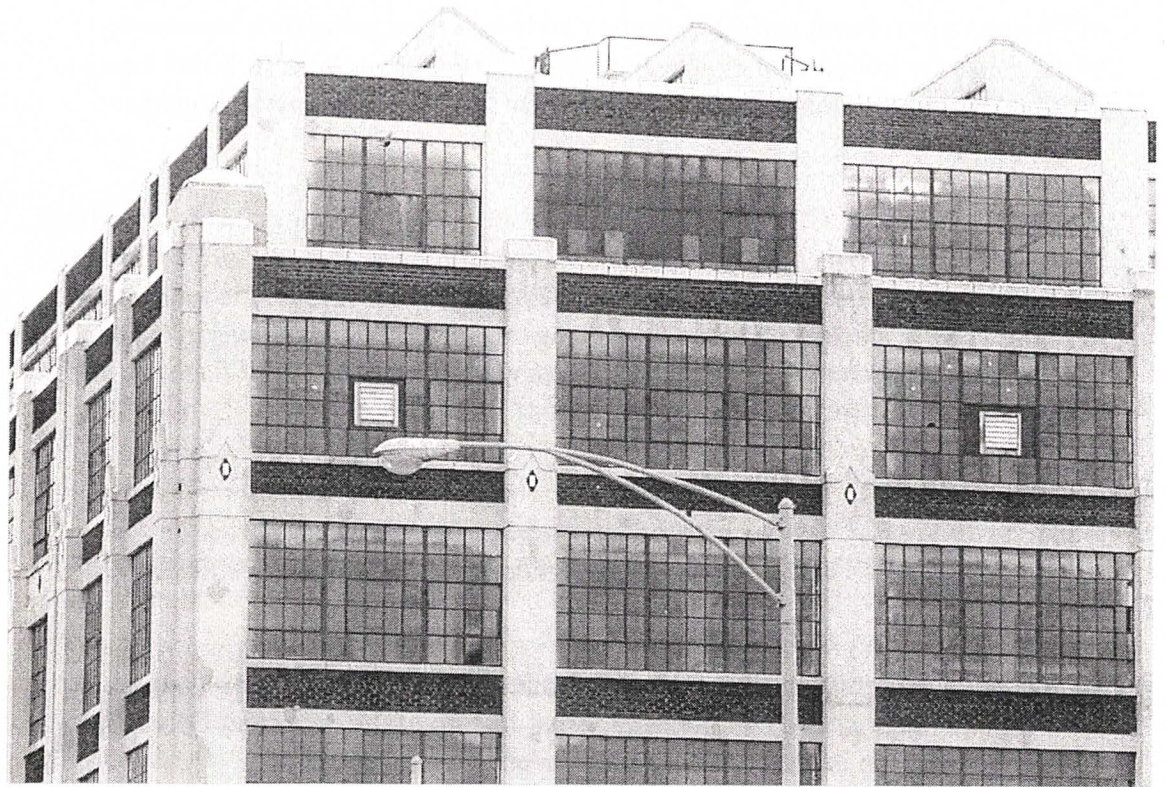
Criterion 4: Important Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

- The Florsheim Shoe Company Building, built for a nationally-prominent shoe manufacturer, is a handsome example of a early 20th-century modern industrial building a building type important to Chicago history.
- The building is a significant industrial expression of modern architectural tenets, in this case applied to an industrial building, which are important in the development of 20th-century Chicago architecture, combining a relative lack of applied ornament with sleek, rectilinear forms formed by its exposed reinforced-concrete structure, multi-paned industrial-sash windows, and brick wall infill.
- The building exhibits excellent design through its handsome overall proportions and visual contrasts of light-colored concrete piers with dark-red brick spandrels and dark window sash.

Criterion 5: Important Architect

Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.



Top: The Florsheim Shoe Company Building's design contrasts pale-colored concrete piers with dark-red brick spandrels.

Left: The building's entrance is ornamented with a terra-cotta plaque bearing the company's name.

- Alfred S. Alschuler, the designer of the Florsheim Shoe Company Building, was one of Chicago's prominent early 20th-century architects, designing such noteworthy buildings as the London Guarantee and Exchange Building, K.A.M. Isaiah Israel Temple, and the Goldblatt Brothers Department Store, all designated Chicago Landmarks.
- Alschuler was one of Chicago's leading, innovative designers of industrial buildings in the early 20th century, and the Florsheim Shoe Company Building exemplifies his philosophy of innovative reinforced-concrete construction as applied to industrial buildings. He is commonly credited as being one of the first architects in Chicago to use reinforced concrete as the structural framework for his industrial factories and warehouses.

Criterion 7: Unique Visual Feature

Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.

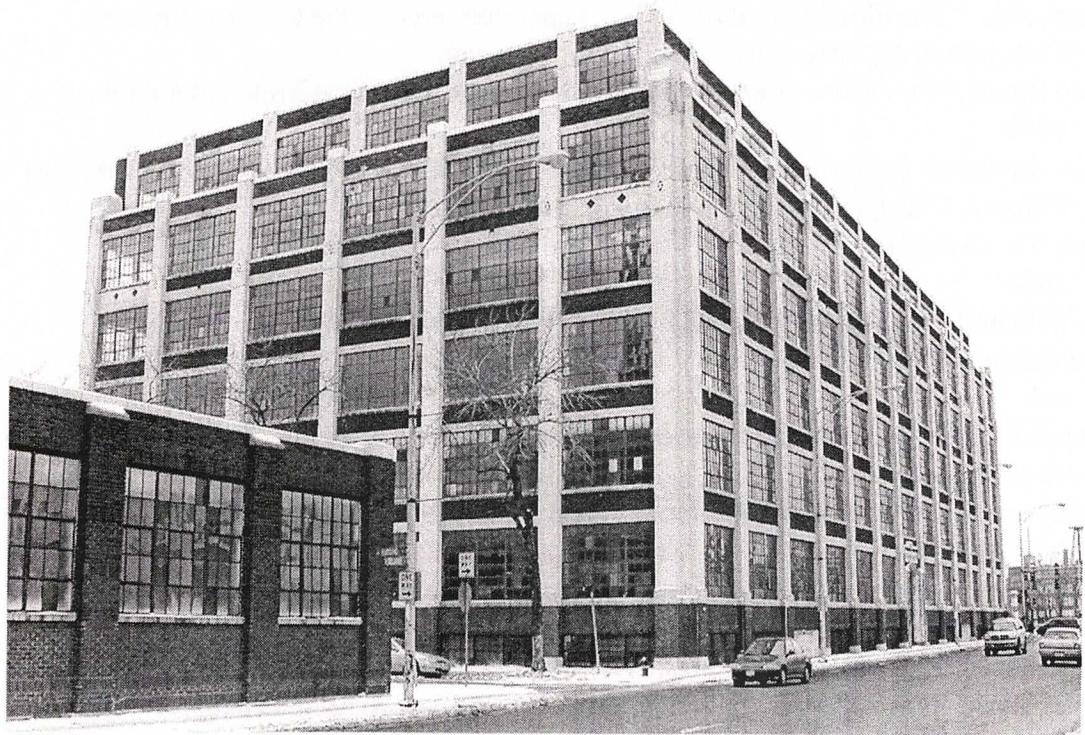
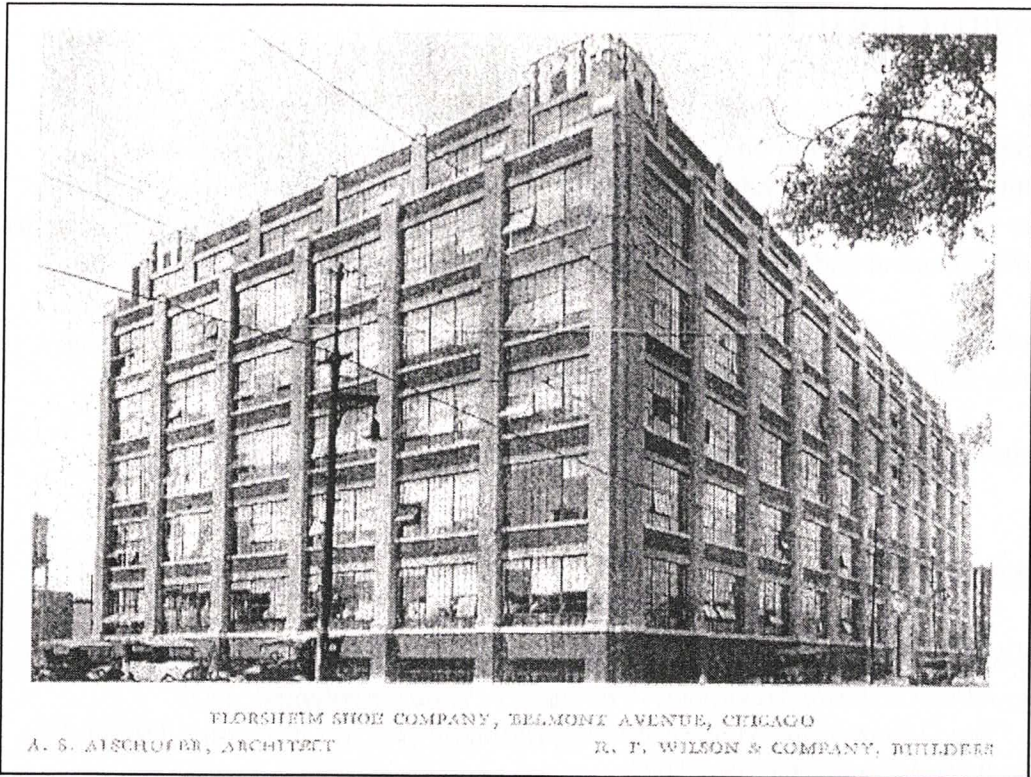
- With its massive scale and distinctive appearance, the Florsheim Shoe Company Building is a commanding and familiar visual feature of the important Belmont-Pulaski intersection in the Northwest Side Avondale neighborhood.

Integrity Criteria

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architecture or aesthetic value.

The Florsheim Shoe Company Building displays excellent physical integrity, displayed through its siting, scale, and overall design in its historic relationship to the surrounding Avondale community area. The building retains almost all of its historic exterior form, materials and detailing, including its exposed reinforced-concrete structural frame, brick wall infill, and metal industrial-sash windows.

Exterior alterations are relatively few and include metal replacement entrance doors and a metal transom at the main (Belmont Avenue) entrance, which are set within the original terra-cotta entrance surround. In addition, small sections of terra-cotta ornament similar to that embellishing the entrance have been removed from the corners of the building's rooftop parapet. The adjacent two-story building south of the Florsheim Shoe Company Building and facing Pulaski Rd. is not included in the proposed designation.



Despite the loss of some original rooftop ornament at the corners, the Florsheim Shoe Company Building retains excellent exterior physical integrity. Top: An early photograph of the building looking southwest. Bottom: A photograph from roughly the same vantage point taken in 2005.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Whenever a building, structure, object, or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the “significant historical and architectural features” of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based upon its evaluation of the Florsheim Shoe Company Building, the Commission recommends that the significant features be identified as:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the six-story Building.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alschuler, Alfred S. “The Design of the Modern Printing Building: No. II—General Layout and Exterior Treatment,” *The Inland Printer*, September 1923.
- _____. “The Design of the Modern Printing Building: No. III—Structural Design,” *The Inland Printer*, October 1923.
- _____. *Commercial and Industrial Buildings*. Chicago, 1926.
- Bowman, Jim. “The Florsheim Shoe Story.” Paper delivered to the Chicago Literary Club, March 29, 2004. <http://www.jimbowman.com>.
- Federico Bucci. *Albert Kahn: Architect of Ford*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993.
- _____. *Chicago Architects Design: A Century of Architectural Drawings from the Art Institute of Chicago*. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1982.
- _____. *Chicago, The Great Central Market*. Chicago: The Chicago Association of Commerce, 1923.
- Curtis, William J. R. *Modern Architecture Since 1900*. 3rd ed. London: Phaidon, 1996.
- _____. *The Landis Award: Its Purpose and Accomplishments*. Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons, n.d.
- Marquis, A.N. *Who's Who in Chicago and Vicinity: The Book of Chicagoans*. Chicago: The A.N. Marquis Co., 1931.
- _____. “Many Structural Improvements Introduced by A.S. Alschuler,” *Chicago Daily News*, 23 January 1937.
- Meites, Hyman L., ed. *History of the Jews in Chicago*. Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society and Wellington Publishing, Inc., 192__.
- Nimmons, George. “Industrial Buildings,” *The American Architect*, 5 Jan. 1926.
- Westfall, Carroll. “Shaping a City: Alfred S. Alschuler and Chicago Architecture, 1900-1930.” Transcript of speech, dated February 12, 1981.
- _____. “Buildings Serving Commerce,” In *Chicago Architecture 1872-1922*. Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2000.
- Wight, Peter B. “Utilitarian Architecture at Chicago,” *The Architectural Record*, February 1910.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CITY OF CHICAGO

Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development

Lori T. Healey, Commissioner

Brian Goeken, Deputy Commissioner for Landmarks

Project Staff

Terry Tatum, research, writing, photography, and layout

Jean Guarino (consultant), research and writing

Brian Goeken, editing

Illustrations

Department of Planning and Development, Landmarks Division: pp. 3, 6, 11 (bottom), 14 (bottom), 17, 19 (bottom).

From various web sites, including www.florsheim.com: p. 5.

Bob Thall for the Commission on Chicago Landmarks: p. 11 (top).

From Bucci, *Albert Kahn*: p. 11 (middle).

From Chicago Historical Society Department of Architecture: p. 13 (top right).

From Zukowsky, ed. *Chicago Architecture, 1872-1922*: p. 13 (bottom).

From *Chicago Daily News*: p. 14 (top).

From Saliga, ed., *The Sky's the Limit*: p. 14 (bottom).

From *The Landis Award*: p. 19 (top).

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law. The commission is staffed by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, 33 N. LaSalle St., Room 1600, Chicago, IL 60602; (312-744-3200) phone; (312-744-2958) TTY; (312-744-9140) fax; web site, <http://www.cityofchicago.org/landmarks>.

This Preliminary Summary of Information is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation proceedings. Only language contained within the City Council's final landmark designation ordinance should be regarded as final.